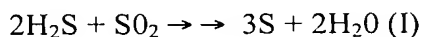


IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for the production of sulfur starting from hydrogen sulphide contained in natural gas, which comprises:

- a) oxidizing part of the hydrogen sulphide to sulfur dioxide;
- b) preparing a solution by dissolving in water the sulfur dioxide obtained in (a);
- c) carrying out the following reaction (I):



by reacting hydrogen sulphide remaining in the natural gas with the solution prepared in (b) to provide a sulfur suspension; and

- d) isolating sulfur from the sulfur suspension or, alternatively, disposing of said sulfur suspension in a site reserved for such purpose,

wherein the hydrogen sulphide is oxidized to SO_2 , by directly burning a mixture of methane and hydrogen sulphide as it exits from an extraction well, without pretreatment with alkanolamine, in the presence of a substoichiometric quantity of oxygen.

2. (Original) The process, according to claim 1, wherein the hydrogen sulphide is recovered from the natural gas by means of absorption with amines.

3. (Original) The process, according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the hydrogen sulphide has a concentration higher than 90%.

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Previously Presented) The process according to claim 1, wherein the oxidation is carried out in the presence of a catalyst consisting essentially of Nb₂O₅ and/or CeO₂ and/or MoO₃ supported onto TiO₂.

7. (Previously Presented) The process, according to claim 1, wherein the reaction mixture containing SO₂ is bubbled through a layer of water.

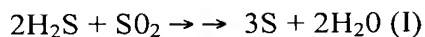
8. (Original) The process, according to claim 7, wherein the natural gas containing hydrogen sulphide is subsequently bubbled in the sulfur dioxide solution in water, obtaining the formation of a stable suspension of sulfur in water.

9. (Previously Presented) The process, according to Claim 1, wherein the reaction (I) takes place at a temperature equal to or lower than room temperature.

10. (Previously Presented) The process, according to Claim 1, wherein the sulfur suspension is treated by ultrasounds, with the effect of disaggregating it, decreasing the dimension of its particles and increasing its stability over time.

11. (Previously Presented) A process for the production of sulfur starting from hydrogen sulphide contained in natural gas, which includes:

- a) oxidizing part of the hydrogen sulphide to sulfur dioxide;
- b) preparing a solution by dissolving in water the sulfur dioxide obtained in (a);
- c) carrying out the following reaction (I):



by reacting hydrogen sulphide remaining in the natural gas with the solution prepared in (b) to provide a sulfur suspension;

wherein the suspension of sulfur is disposed in a geologic structure by injection in a porous matrix or a fracture or by injection under hydraulic fracturing conditions, at a temperature lower than the melting point of sulfur.

12. (Previously Presented) The process, according to Claim 11, wherein the suspension of sulfur in water is disposed in a geologic structure, by injection in a fracture.

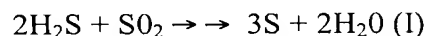
13. (Previously Presented) The process, according to Claim 11, wherein the suspension of sulfur in water is disposed in a geologic structure by injection under hydraulic fracturing conditions.

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Previously Presented) The process according to Claim 11, wherein the suspension of sulfur in water is disposed in a geologic structure by injection in a porous matrix.

16. (Currently Amended) A process for the production of a sulfur suspension starting from hydrogen sulphide contained in natural gas, which comprises:

- a) oxidizing part of the hydrogen sulphide to sulfur dioxide;
- b) preparing a solution by dissolving in water the sulfur dioxide obtained in (a);
- c) carrying out the following reaction (I):



by reacting hydrogen sulphide remaining in the natural gas with the solution prepared in (b) to provide the sulfur suspension,

wherein the hydrogen sulphide is oxidized to SO_2 by directly burning a mixture of methane and hydrogen sulphide as it exits from an extraction well, without pretreatment with alkanolamine, in the presence of a substoichiometric quantity of oxygen.

17. (Previously Presented) The process, according to claim 1, wherein sulfur is isolated from the sulfur suspension.

18. (Previously Presented) The process, according to claim 2, wherein sulfur is isolated from the sulfur suspension.

19. (Previously Presented) The process, according to claim 3, wherein sulfur is isolated from the sulfur suspension.